

Dear Friends,

First things first. Thank you to everyone who has reached out to wish me a full and speedy recovery from my accident. I have a way to go still, but progress has been good. I appreciate your concern and feel immense gratitude that I did not suffer more serious injuries than I did from the fall.

Having said that, because not everyone in our community was able to attend all our Yamim Noreaim services, allow me now, in this newsletter message, to recap what I said from the bima over Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur. Rather than reprinting the entirety of the sermons, I have distilled my messages into an ongoing set of bullet points. If I abbreviated more than I should have, and if as a result, you find any of my points hard to follow, please do not hesitate to reach out for clarification. Please do keep in mind that the reason I chose the thematic topic that I did for the sermons (Responsible Stewardship over God's Creation) is that I was hoping to inspire our community to support the JCNWJ's newest initiative, which is our Green Committee that has been tasked with helping guide the Jewish Center's behavior to be as environmentally responsible as we can.



היום יעמיד במשפט כל יצור עולמים.

Today, all creation is called to judgement

- Judgment. On this birthday of the world, we are being called to judgment. On this birthday of the world, we acknowledge our imperfections. On this birthday of the world, we beg God for mercy. Mercy for ourselves, for our friends, for our families, for our community, for everyone. We ask for mercy, because the opposite is too difficult to fathom.
- On the question of how God will evaluate the nature of our interactions with God's **non**-human creations, I fear the ledger will show less-than-favorable results. Not that we've been Shanah Tovah, I want to start by publicly forgiving anyone who has wronged me during the past year. I also ask forgiveness from anyone I may have hurt, however inadvertently it may have been. I next want to say thank you to my board of trustees, who make sure that the good of this temple supersedes any personal goals they have. They work tirelessly for the good of all of you. I do want to send out a couple of shout outs to members of the board who go above and beyond what is called for from their positions. First is Jeff Berkowitz, who takes care of this building like he lives here, and considering he is third generation of this temple, it is apparent how much love he has for this building. Second is Suzi Marr, who has turned the Sisterhood into the most exciting part of the adult activities in this congregation. Third is my wife Iris, who worries about every detail in running the High Holiday services and must adjust constantly about who is doing what, as people have issues, become ill, have accidents or contract covid. The amount of work that she puts in to make these services run as smooth as possible is incredible. My overriding goal in being the eternal president of this congregation is to be able to leave this congregation to the next generation of Warren County Jews. One of the things that I see is that the folks who show up for the High Holidays and do not become members, assume that we will be here year after year. This is reasonable, as for my whole existence in Warren County, this temple has been here. But there are no guarantees that this will continue. We need you to step up to the plate

and become full members of the community, who pay dues and dedicate some of your time to make this place a vibrant Jewish community. The one thing I can tell you from my experience is that you will get way more than you will give by donating your time and talents to this community. Up to now, we have been doing a pretty good job of having a vibrant Jewish community with such a small membership base. Part of this, we can thank those who came before us, and left us a good deal of cash that we use to do many of the things we do. Most congregations of our size do not have a Rabbi, let alone a cantor for the year. The fact that we can do this year after year shows a commitment from all of you. BUT, and here's the but. This congregation is aging. Our Sunday School only has a few students. Younger families are not flocking to us, if they even exist in our area. If this congregation is to survive into the future, we need to figure out how to engage the younger Jewish families in the area. We have been told that many churches and temples currently are not doing as well as they have in the past, due to lack of younger families not engaging in religion these days. That is not an excuse for us not to try hard to be more inviting to younger families. destructive, but intentionality and reality don't always reconcile.

- Nearly 3,000 years ago, the prophet Isaiah issued an ominous warning to the Jews of the southern kingdom of Judah for having “twisted God’s instructions, violated God’s laws, and broken God’s covenant.” (Isaiah 24:5). His forecast was indeed dire: “Terror, pit and snare await you, inhabitants of the earth...,” he proclaimed. “The earth is broken into fragments. The earth is in convulsion. The earth reels like a drunkard, it sways like a hut in the storm, weighed down by its transgression, and it falls, never to rise again.” (Isaiah 24:17-20)
- This summer has illustrated all too well how the climate crisis has made extreme weather a part of everyday life -- heat waves in the U.S., wildfires in Europe, floods in Asia...it is a time of crisis indeed.
- “The means by which we live,” wrote Martin Luther King, Jr. almost 60 years ago (1963) “have outdistanced the ends for which we live. Our scientific power has out-run our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men.” (Martin Luther King, Jr., Strength to Love)

- On the 6th day, God said (Gen 1:26)

נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ
וְיָרְדוּ בְדִגְתַּי הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל־הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל־הַרְמֵשׁ הַרְמֵשׁ עַל־הָאָרֶץ:

“Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness. They shall have dominion of the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.”

Dominion. It’s a potentially catastrophic word, because if we take it to mean that we deserve full and unfettered authority to do whatever we want to the earth, whenever we want to do it, for whatever selfish motivations we can imagine, we’ll just wind up where we already are, living in a world that faces existential threats of destruction.

But there’s more, because in the very next verse (1:27) we read:

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ
In the image of God, God created [us].

- In the image of God. We **are** the image of God. Our mandate is to imitate God, to chase after and embody the **qualities** of God as best we can.
- When we pray to God, when we say, “Eloheinu Melech HaOlam, ruler of the world,” we acknowledge God’s dominion over us, and show gratitude for God’s beneficence. So, in granting us dominion over the created world, God gives us a clear charge, which is to nurture, sustain, and love Creation just as God nurtures, sustains, and loves us.
- Psalm 104 paints the picture of a God whose love for the natural world is so strong that God will stop at nothing to satisfy the needs of every one of Creation’s needs. While we humans have been hard at work depleting our water sources in pursuit of all sorts of inconsequential wants and desires, God “makes springs gush forth in torrents . . . giving drink to all the wild beasts.” (104:10-11) God “waters mountains from the divine lofts, satiating the fruit of God’s work.” (104:13) God “makes grass grow for the cattle, and brings up plants for people to eat.” (104:14)
- Since we are charged with the obligation of striving to imitate the qualities of God, it must, therefore, be a fundamental covenantal obligation for us to love and care for the natural world, too.
- As we learn in Genesis 9, when Noah disembarks from the ark, God says (9:9-12):

וְאָנֹכִי הִנְנִי מִקְיָם אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם וְאֶת־וּרְעֵכֶם אֶתְּרִיבֶם:

I now establish My covenant with you and your offspring to come.

וְאֵת כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר אִתְּכֶם בְּעוֹף בְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל־חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ אִתְּכֶם מִכָּל חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ:

and with every living thing that is with you—birds, cattle, and every wild beast as well—all that have come out of the ark, every living thing on earth.

וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם . . .

I will maintain My covenant with you . . .

וּבֵין כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה אֲשֶׁר אִתְּכֶם לְדֹרֹת עוֹלָם: . . .

. . . and every living creature with you, for all ages to come.

It's a comforting and beautiful sentiment, to be sure, but so too is it a terrifying responsibility, because once God makes this covenantal promise, our obligation becomes clear: No matter what, whether intentionally or not, every time we allow our environmental choices to help bring another species to extinction, or another human being to be displaced, or put out of work, or die, we fall back one step farther away from fulfilling our mandate to strive after divine behavior. This is no small thing, because every time we regress, we advance one step closer to our own demise.

- Leviticus 19:3 commands: **וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ** that we are to love others as we love ourselves.
 - Exodus 22 commands - **כִּי-לֹא-תִמְנָה וְיָתוּם לֹא תַעֲנִין** that we must never ill-treat the widow or orphans by which I take Torah to be requiring that we always support the most vulnerable among us.
 - Deuteronomy 16:20 commands: - **צֶדֶק צֶדֶק תִּרְדָּף** that we must never stop striving after justice.
 - Are we really doing enough?" especially when it comes to how our choices affect the most vulnerable among us.
 - Is it **justice** when we allow our unrestrained consumerism to play even a minor role in 1/3 of Pakistan being submerged by monsoon rain runoff? Is it **justice** when we allow industrial chemical dumps to pollute the water systems of inner-city neighborhoods just so our cleaning sprays can be a nickel less expensive? Is it **justice** when we allow indigenous residents of the Amazon to be displaced by massive deforestation so the fast food industry can cultivate a steady and affordable supply of beef? Is it **justice** when we sit by passively as large industry clear cuts vast areas in order to plant the most profitable crops, thus reducing biodiversity, depleting the earth of its natural richness, and increasing the likelihood of infectious diseases such as COVID 19 jumping from animals to human beings?
 - Climate change is not one of 26 different causes that we care about – it is a cause that affects everything we cherish. The Pentagon has long called climate change a “threat multiplier,” which means that it amplifies existing problems. If we care about pandemics and public health, we care about climate. If we care about racism and human rights, we care about climate. If we care about poverty, homelessness, and hunger, we care about climate. If we care about immigration and refugees, we care about climate. (How many people worldwide will be forced to move by 2050 because of climate change? Estimates range between 25 million and one billion.). If we care about violence against women and girls, we care about climate: climate change aggravates gender-based violence. If we care about preventing war, we care about climate: climate change increases the risk of conflicts over increasingly scarce resources, such as water and arable land.

In short, if we care about loving God and neighbor, we care about climate. The climate does not belong to a special-interest group. If we like to breathe, if we like to eat, if we want to leave our children a world they can live in, we care about climate. (-- Episcopal priest and climate activist, Margaret Bullitt-Jonas in <https://revivingcreation.org/preaching-when-life-depends-on-it-climate-crisis-and-gospelhope/>)

- To this, I add, if we care about **justice**, we care about climate. If we care to express love for God's creation, we care about climate. And if we care about climate, we'll actually do something about it. But what? What **can** we do? We're just us. The cultural anthropologist, Margaret Mead, may have had a point when she wrote that we must “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has,” but really, how likely is it that our small group of thoughtful committed citizens here at the

Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey will actually wind up being that small group about which Professor Mead was writing? The odds seem so overwhelming against us. So, again, what **can** we do?

- Deuteronomy 30:

ראה נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם אֶת־הַחַיִּים וְאֶת־הַטּוֹב וְאֶת־הַמָּוֶת וְאֶת־הָרָע:

See, I set before you this day life and prosperity, death and adversity.

וְאִם־יִפְנֶה לְבָבְךָ וְלֹא תִשְׁמַע וְנִדְחַת וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִית לֵאלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְעַבַדְתָּם:

But if your heart turns away and you give no heed, and are lured into the worship and service of other gods,

הַגִּדְתִּי לָכֶם הַיּוֹם כִּי אֶבְד תֵּאבְדוּן לֹא־תֵאָרִיכוּ יָמִים עַל־הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם עוֹבְרִים אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן לְבוֹא שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ:

I declare to you this day that you shall certainly perish; you shall not long endure on the soil that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

- “...if your heart turns away and you give no heed...” Too many among us fail to take the messaging of these words seriously. Words like “hoax” are too common in the social vernacular. Short term comfort rules the day. Selfishness puts blinders on too many of our eyes, so much so that we can no longer discern reality from fantasy. And, all too often, it is those who have some material profits to gain who choose to continue blinding us, even when they have all the information they need to know they are speaking lies.
- The 6th Century BCE prophet, Jeremiah, speaks of these false prophets when warning us of the Israelite leaders who were downplaying the Babylonian threat leading up to the fall of the Temple in 586 BCE: (6:13-15)

כִּי מִקְטָנָם וְעַד־גְּדוֹלָם כָּל־זֶרַע בָּצַע וּמִנְבִיא וְעַד־כֹּהֵן כָּל־זֶרַע עָשָׂה שָׁקֶר:

For from the smallest to the greatest,

They are all greedy for gain;

Priest and prophet alike,

They all act falsely.

וַיִּרְפְּאוּ אֶת־שִׁבְרֵי עַמִּי עַל־נִקְלָה לֵאמֹר שְׁלוֹם | שְׁלוֹם וְאִין שְׁלוֹם:

They offer healing offhand

For the wounds of My people,

Saying, “All is well, all is well,”

When nothing is well.

הִבִּישׁוּ כִּי תוֹעֵבָה עָשׂוּ גַם־בְּיָדָם לֹא־יִבֹּשׁוּ גַם־הַכְּלִיִּם לֹא יִדְעוּ לָכֵן יִפְּלוּ בְּנִפְלִים בְּעַת־פְּקוּדָתִים יִכְשְׁלוּ אָמַר יְהוָה:

They have acted shamefully;

They have done abhorrent things—

Yet they do not feel shame,

And they cannot be made to blush.

Assuredly, they shall fall among the falling,

They shall stumble at the time when I punish them

—said the LORD.

- While the responsible among us may reject the pontificators who speak and act with such hubris, I ask you: Are we doing enough? Are we really doing what we can to protect our blessed inheritance?

- Do we stand boldly? Are we **really** standing with God?
- Tradition tells us that when God created humanity, God took the human, showed them the splendor of the Garden of Eden, and said: “Do not destroy My world, for if you do, there will be nobody after you to make it right again.” (Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13).
- Progress and repair won’t happen quickly. Scientists tell us that enough greenhouse gasses have already been released that global warming will absolutely continue to get worse before we’ll be able to start bringing it back down, because many of those kinds of gasses can remain active for even a hundred years. This is not going to be a quick fix.
- “The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything except our thinking. Thus, we are drifting toward catastrophe beyond conception. We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if mankind is to survive.” (Albert Einstein)
- A new manner of thinking. That’s what we need.
- So what exactly is that new manner of thinking that we so desperately need? What is it that we will have to do if we really want to survive? What is it that will get us thinking beyond the recycling bin in our kitchen? Or the bamboo flooring that we’re considering for the living room? Or the electric car that we feel called to purchase?
- I wish I had a simple answer for you, but I don’t. I can’t, because there isn’t one. What I do know, however, is that until we transform our thinking to recognize and prioritize the presence of life – indeed, of love – in our environmental stewardship...we’ll never be able even to **begin** the work.
- The 12th century Spanish master, Ibn Ezra, had it right when he wrote that “the life of human[ity] depends on trees.” (Midrash Sifre 20:19) Friends, there are no two ways about it. Human life is inherently and inextricably tied to God’s Creation.
- To those who question whether humanity actually has the capacity to destroy the earth through sin, let me remind you of the Great Flood. (Genesis 6:5-7)

וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה כִּי רַבָּה רָעַת הָאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ וְכָל־יִצְרָר מִחֻשְׁבַּת לְבוֹ רַק רָע כָּל־הַיּוֹם: יְהוָה
 saw how great was human wickedness on earth—how every plan devised by the human mind was
 nothing but evil all the time.

וַיִּנְחַם יְהוָה כִּי־עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֱלֹהִים לְבוֹ:
 And regretted having made humankind on earth. With a sorrowful heart,

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶמְחָה אֶת־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר־בְּרָאתִי מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה מֵאָדָם עַד־בְּהֵמָה עַד־רֶמֶשׂ וְעַד־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם כִּי נַחַמְתִּי כִּי עָשִׂיתֶם:

said, “I will blot out from the earth humankind whom I created—humans together with beasts, creeping things, and birds of the sky; for I regret that I made them.”

- A legend, perhaps, but at its core is unadulterated truth: The choices we make bring life and death results to others. Unless we bring ourselves truly to love all of God’s Creation, and not just ourselves, our own demise will be sure to come.
- When humanity, represented by Abraham, is willing to sacrifice, God steps in to reminded us to save instead. Perhaps you remember from that story the thrice-repeated word, Hineini. Abraham says it to God, to Isaac, and to the angel. Translated literally, it means, “Here I am,” but it means so much more. “Hineini” means, “Here I am, ready to offer my unequivocally full presence, with absolute devotion and pure love.” Hineini is a word used only within the very most intimate of relationships.
- It is time we stop thinking that simply refraining from doing harm is sufficient and instead work to form a hineini relationship with God’s Creation.

- Adam was created from the Adamah. In English, that means that humanity was created from the earth. God quite literally took a hunk of clay and breathed the breath of life into us. In other words, we were created in as intimate a relationship imaginable with the earth. It is high time we start behaving like it.
- "Good stewardship is a place to begin the conversation about creation care," she writes, "but we are called to go a step further. ***We must learn to see the world as God sees it.*** In the Bible, the earth is not an inanimate object... In the Bible, creation is a lot more like us humans than we like to admit. When we learn to see the earth as like ourselves, we begin to understand how the command to "do unto others..." extends beyond our human relationships to our treatment of animals, plants, and soil." (-- Baptist Minister, Sarah Jobe)

Conclusion:

As a community, let us begin this work of reckoning. Let us commit to living our lives by the conscious reminder that at our most natural state, we are one with the earth.

Look around. Think of your neighbors. Remember your loved ones. Dedicate yourselves to the health and happiness of future generations. And as you leave this holy building tonight, look around you. Look at this earth, at God's Creation.

Tomorrow morning, feel the brisk air, see the grass, the trees, the animals...the sunshine. What would you do to protect this earth if we loved it with the same intensity that we love our closest friends and family?

Are we up to the task? I pray we are.

Actually, no. I don't **pray** we are... I **know** we are, not only because I know this community, but also because I know, as you do too, that the alternative just won't do.

L'Shalom,
Rabbi Dubin